

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /057 W

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0859

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 0468

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NP

SUBJECT: ELECTION REFORMS ANNOUNCED

REF: 77 KATHMANDU 4219

1. HIS MAJESTY HAS RECENTLY PROMULGATED FIVE NEW ORDINANCES CHANGING ELECTION PROCEDURES FOR VARIOUS LEVELS OF PANCHAYATS. WHILE OFFICIAL GAZETTE WITH FULL TEXTS MAY NOT BE OUT FOR ANOTHER WEEK OR SO, PRESS REPORTS AND CLARIFYING PRESS CONFERENCE JAN. 21 BY BWOENTO-VILLAGE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN (BVNC)

CENTRAL COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, BISWABANDA THAPA, HAVE PROVIDED SUFFICIENT DETAIL FOR PRELIMINARY REPORT. THREE OF ORDINANCES CLEARLY APPEAR TO BE INTENDED TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS OF BVNC PEOPLE'S CONVENTION HELD IN BIRATNAGAR LAST SEPTEMBER ( REFTEL) WHILE OTHER TWO PRESUMABLY REFLECT MORE RECENT THINKING. ORDINANCES REPORTEDLY PROVIDE:

(A) THAT NATIONAL PANCHAYAT MEMBERS WILL HENCEFORTH BE ELECTED BY DISTRICT PANCHAYATS, ELIMINATING EXTRA LAYER AT  
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ZONE LEVEL;

(B) THAT THERE WILL INDEED BE ELECTIONS WHEN THERE ARE MORE CANDIDATES THAN THERE ARE SEATS--I.E. THAT RIGID "CONSENSUS" SYSTEM WHICH HAS PREVAILED OVER PAST TWO YEARS RESULTING IN ONLY ONE CHOICE FOR EACH POSITION WILL NO LONGER BE IN FORCE.

(C) THAT PANCHAYAT OFFICERS WILL HENCEFORTH BE ELECTED BY VOTE OF 50 PERCENT OR MORE OF MEMBERS, WITH RUNOFF BETWEEN

TWO LEADERS IF NO ONE OBTAINS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY ON FIRST BALLOT (THIS IS IN COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS REQUIREMENT FOR TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY, OR, FAILING THAT, A NOMINATION BY THE BVNC).

(D) THAT PANCHAYAT OFFICERS ELECTED TO SEATS AT NEXT HIGHER LEVEL WILL IMMEDIATELY HAVE TO RESIGN LOWER OFFICERS; AND

(E) THAT BVNC WILL NO LONGER HAVE RIGHT TO APPOINT ADDITIONAL MEMBERS TO PANCHAYATS OF VARIOUS LEVELS. INSTEAD CLASS ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE EX OFFICIO MEMBERS WITH VOTING RIGHTS IN ELECTIONS FOR NEXT HIGHER LEVEL.

2. BVNC CHAIRMAN THAPA IN HIS EXPLANATION OF CHANGES, NOTED THAT ELIMINATING ONE LEVEL IN ELECTION PROCESS WAS INTENDED TO MAKE ELECTIONS MORE "PEOPLE ORIENTED." IT WOULD HELP GRASS ROOTS KNOW MORE ABOUT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS AND MAKE REPRESENTATIVES MORE RESPONSIVE. RE PROVISION THAT OFFICERS MUST RESIGN IF THEY MOVE UP (THIS WAS NOT RECOMMENDATION OF BIRATNAGAR CONVENTION) THAPA STATED INTENTION WAS TO DISCOURAGE SUCH ATTEMPTS IMMEDIATELY TO SEEK HIGHER OFFICE, PROVIDING GREATER CONTINUITY IN POSITION OF DISTRICT PANCHAYAT PRESIDENT AND GREATER IMPORTANCE TO THAT POSITION. REASONING BEHIND DECISION ON ELIMINATING BVNC NOMINEES TO ADDITIONAL SEATS IN PANCHAYAT (AGAIN A NEW PROPOSAL) IS LESS CLEAR. THAPA CLAIMED THIS WILL PROMOTE "HOMOGENEITY AND EFFECTIVE COORDINATION" AMONG PANCHAYAT MEMBERS, BUT WITH CLASS ORGANIZATIONS NOW APPARENTLY TO BE AUTOMATICALLY

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REPRESENTED IT IS HARD TO SEE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGE.

3. COMMENT: EMBASSY WILL OF COURSE REVIEW OFFICIAL TEXTS WHEN RELEASED AND MAY HAVE FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AT THAT TIME. IT DOES APPEAR CLEAR AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, THAT THREE BIRATNAGAR RESOLUTIONS (REFTEL) ARE--AT LEAST IN THEORY--NOW IN FORCE AND THAT THESE CHANGES DO INDEED GIVE GREATER VOICE AND PARTICIPATION TO PEOPLE. BUT BVNC CHAIRMAN THAPA MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT CHANGES DO NOT GO SO FAR AS MANY--INCLUDING SEVERAL NEWS-PAPER EDITORIALS WRITTEN PRIOR TO HIS PRESS CONFERENCE--HAD HOPED. SPECIFICALLY, BVNC WILL STILL HAVE TO ENDORSE ALL CANDIDATES (THAPA ARGUED THAT ALL COUNTRIES, REGARDLESS OF SYSTEM, HAVE PROVISION FOR APPROVING CANDIDATES), THAT ONLY THOSE WHO HAD "DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO PANCHAYAT SYSTEM" WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RUN, AND THAT OBJECTIVE WOULD STILL BE TO SECURE CONSENSUS BEHIND ONE CANDIDATE IF POSSIBLE. THAPA NOTED IN PARTICULAR THAT BVNC FELT DISTRICT PANCHAYAT PRESIDENT (WITH HIS INCREASED AUTHORITY) SHOULD "IF AT ALL POSSIBLE" BE CONSENSUS CHOICE. IN SHORT, WHILE THERE HAS BEEN CHANGE IN DIRECTION OF GREATER PARTICIPATION, IT IS MORE CAUTIOUS THAN BOLD. BUT IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT HMG CHOOSES TO TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME AND TO SEE HOW THINGS GO. THE NEXT TEXT WILL BE TO SEE HOW MANY

SEATSIN UPCOMING ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IN THREE ZONES  
WILL INDEED BE CONTESTED AND WHO COMES OUT ON TOP.  
EAVES

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## Message Attributes

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